

Hartranft Award Remarks

Thank you so much for having me here tonight.

One thing that has always stood out to me is your slogan, “Freedom to Fly.” This isn’t just a slogan to me, or to any of you, I’m sure. That slogan, and aviation more broadly, is a symbol or by-product of our American exceptionalism.

You see, it is not coincidental that aviation was born here in America. We were the first nation where the conditions were right, and they were right because of the kind of nation we had and must maintain. We live under the rule of law, with everyone equal under it. That isn’t so in other places. Because of this, Americans are free to pursue their own happiness and to enjoy private property rights that allow the fruits of our labor to accumulate. Americans have thus enjoyed a higher standard of living, and with that, the time to think, dream, and innovate.

And innovate we did! Think, for example, of what those two brothers did at Kitty Hawk that windy Thursday, December 13 in 1903. None of this is an accident.

But AOPA, and the freedom to fly, is connected to American exceptionalism in an even more direct and technical way. Its founder, Doc Hartranft, and the namesake of this award, was the descendant of Roger Sherman, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

That document led, of course, to a magnificent war, and then to the creation of our Constitution. Our Constitution which embodies and manifests the very ingredients I just mentioned and that yield our American exceptionalism. So, American exceptionalism is in AOPA’s blood.

This belief in America's unique status manifested itself in Doc Hartranft's commitment to protecting and advocating for pilots. In 1938, the airlines had no shortage of access to Congress, and Doc saw the threat that could be to general aviation. In 1939, he founded this great organization to give us pilots a voice here in Washington and across the nation. For years, Doc was AOPA's only employee, working tirelessly on our behalf. We can look around now and see that all of his hard work really paid off.

While we may have won a major victory last year with third class medical reform, I will continue to stand with and advocate for the general aviation community. There are still plenty of areas in need of major reform. Things like FAA reauthorization will be coming through this Congress, and, like Doc Hartranft would have wanted, we must ensure that general aviators' voices are heard during that process.

The victories I am being given credit for are really the result of the hard work of many members of Congress, including my mentor Rep. Sam Graves. I share tonight's award with all of them as well.

For my family, this will be certainly the highest honor in my public career. So, on behalf of all of us in Congress who work every day to keep the freedom to fly alive, thank you for this special honor.